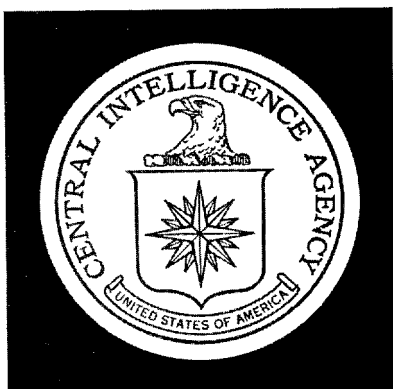
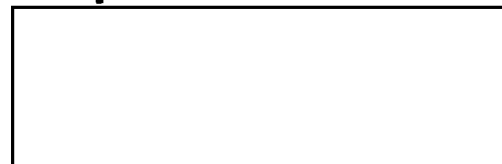


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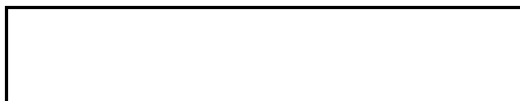
## MEMORANDUM

### *The Situation in Vietnam*

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HIGHLIGHTS

Heavy fighting is continuing in Quang Ngai Province as allied forces continue to press their offensive. Interest in the South Vietnamese presidential election is sharpening with the target date for the promulgation of the constitution only a little more than two months away.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:

Three allied operations continue to close in around a Communist force in northeastern Quang Ngai Province (Paras. 1-2). US Marines of Operation STONE in Quang Nam Province have killed 191 enemy soldiers (Para. 3). US Marines in Operation DECK HOUSE VI have killed 70 Communists while searching the coastal area of southeastern Quang Ngai Province for Communist forces and installations (Para. 4). The joint US/South Vietnamese Army Operation FAIRFAX, which has been sweeping the area surrounding Saigon, encountered two Viet Cong platoons on 20 February (Para. 5).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:

A "government" candidate for the future presidency will win without difficulty, according to two members of the Constituent Assembly (Paras. 1-3). The ambassadors of the countries which attended the Manila Conference last fall will meet in Saigon on 27 February (Para. 4).

III. North Vietnamese Military Developments:

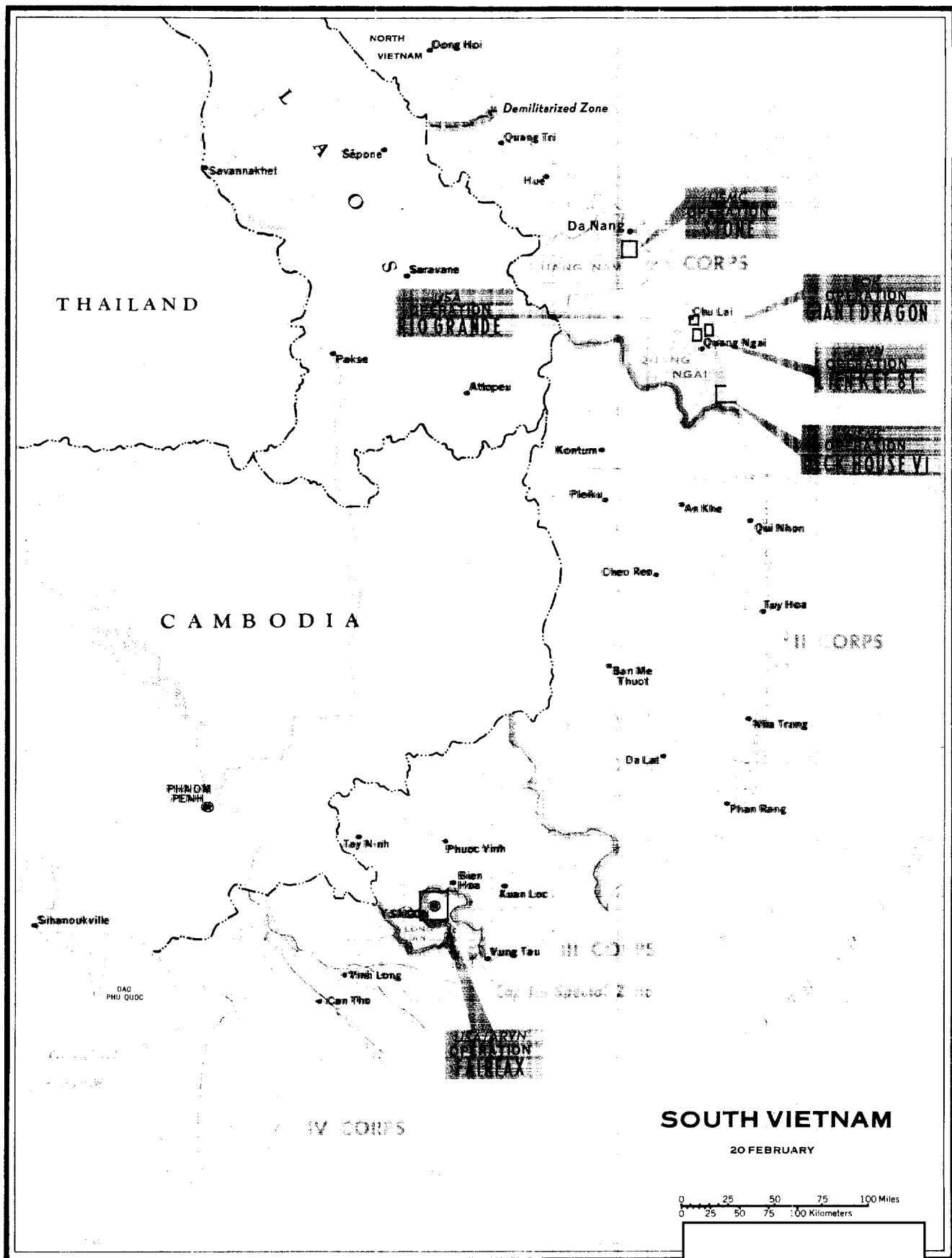
There is nothing of significance to report.

IV. Other Communist Military Developments:

There is nothing of significance to report.

V. Communist Political Developments: Peking's commentary on 19 February on the Vietnam question is the latest in a series directed mainly against the USSR (Paras. 1-2).

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. The major three-nation military campaign targeted against elements of two Communist divisions in the populated coastal lowlands of northeastern Quang Ngai Province continues to report heavy contact with enemy forces. South Vietnamese forces in Operation LIEN KET 81 are moving from the south toward identified enemy locations. US forces in Operation RIO GRANDE are pushing down from the north while South Korean marines in Operation GIANT DRAGON are sweeping in from the coast in an attempt to trap the Communist force.

2. The South Vietnamese report that, as a result of several heavy encounters on 19 February, 388 enemy soldiers have now been killed and nearly 200 weapons captured. The South Koreans report that 55 Communists have surrendered with passes and that 100 other persons have been apprehended as Communist suspects. Allied casualties have been light; 44 have been reported killed and 192 wounded.

3. US Marines participating in the two-battalion Operation STONE in the flat scrub and ricelands south of Da Nang in Quang Nam Province killed 17 enemy soldiers and also uncovered 39 fresh enemy graves on 20 February. Since this search-and-destroy operation began on 11 February, 191 enemy soldiers have been killed compared with US losses of nine killed and 71 wounded. In addition, 51 Communist suspects have been detained.

4. US Marines in the one-battalion Operation DECK HOUSE VI have reported light, sporadic contact with Communist forces in the coastal salt flats of southeastern Quang Ngai Province. Seventy enemy troops have been killed compared with American casualties of two killed and 17 wounded. This search-and-destroy operation, which began with an amphibious landing on 16 February, is designed to seek out Communist forces and installations in an area suspected to be a major Viet Cong infiltration point.

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5. Allied elements participating in US/ARVN search-and-destroy Operation FAIRFAX, which has been sweeping the area immediately surrounding the city of Saigon since 30 November, have reported contacting two Viet Cong platoons early on 20 February in Long An Province. During the ensuing hour-long battle, 12 Viet Cong were killed and two Communist suspects detained. Five weapons and 20 claymore mines were also captured. There were no friendly casualties reported. Viet Cong casualties in the operation are 445 killed, while friendly losses stand at 66 killed and 303 wounded. A total of 153 Viet Cong have been detained and 2,059 other persons are being held as Communist suspects.

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## II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. With the target date for promulgation of the constitution only a little more than two months away, interest in the presidential elections is sharpening. Although no date has been set for the election, it is supposed to take place within three to five months after the constitution is in effect. Premier Ky has publicly indicated that the government will strive to hold the election at the earliest date.

2. In this connection, two prominent delegates in the Constituent Assembly are reported [redacted]

[redacted] to have stated that the "government" candidate for president will win without any difficulty. One of the delegates said that the resources of the Revolutionary Development and Information ministries alone would ensure a government candidate's election even if an opposition candidate had a 500-million piaster campaign fund available to him.

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3. These comments point up the problems facing various independent civilian presidential aspirants, none of whom presently has any organized national political base. In the short time until elections, it remains questionable whether the few existing political parties or factions are capable of merging into cohesive or effective alliances to support presidential candidates. In this political vacuum, the organization which appears to have the most effective base is the military establishment, due in part to its extensive influence in the government from the district level through the Directorate.

### Manila Conference Ambassadors to Meet

4. A meeting of ambassadors of the countries which attended last fall's Manila Conference will be held on 27 February in Saigon. The Vietnamese Government is scheduled to brief the ambassadors on progress made in the last few months in the political, economic, military, and pacification spheres. In addition, South Vietnamese Foreign Minister Tran Van Do will present his government's current view on the subject of peace talks.

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III. NORTH VIETNAMESE MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. Peking's commentary on 20 February on the Vietnam question is the latest in a series directed mainly against the Soviet Union in the context of the recently intensified anti-Soviet campaign. The authoritative People's Daily Observer article condemns US-Soviet "collusion" on the Vietnam question, claiming that Moscow and Washington are pushing a "peace negotiation fraud" in an attempt to force the Vietnamese people to surrender.

2. China's recently increased commentary on Vietnam may also be designed in part to bolster Hanoi's resolve to continue the war effort. Observer asserts that a suspension of US bombing raids on North Vietnam would not change anything and that only a complete US withdrawal from Vietnam would bring peace. This differs from recent North Vietnamese statements that an end to the bombings "could" bring peace talks. The Chinese article insists that the Vietnamese must tie down US forces in a protracted war in order to assure final victory. Observer promises Chinese support, but as usual the article makes no specific commitments beyond the general statement that the Chinese "will make the greatest national sacrifice" in aiding the Vietnamese until the US is driven out.

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